

*People - Hall*

## Parker Hall, "The Lone Skipper"

Manley H. Grant has a by-lined story in the Sept. 10, 1974 issue of the **Maine Sunday Telegram** titled THE LONE SKIPPER. Grant's fascinating narrative begins:

"Would an old sea captain with plenty of savvy eat a whole pie, paper plate and all? According to some members of the Rebekah Lodge at Stockton Springs, Me., Captain Parker Hall accomplished that amazing feat before their very eyes.

"Many stories have been written about Capt. Parker J. Hall, the colorful character known along the New England coast as 'The Lone Skipper.' He was born on the south shore of Massachusetts. Although he was not a down-easter by birth, he spent most of his later years on the Maine coast. When he wasn't sailing, he lived in a little house near the beach at Sandy Point."

The final paragraphs of Grant's story rekindled memories of Captain Hall, whom we profiled in a **Boston Sunday Post** article in 1948:

"Old-time acquaintances along Penobscot Bay thought the old sea dog was about to 'swallow the anchor' when he took off for his native...Massachusetts, but they were fooled again. Instead of retiring, he bought the beautiful little schooner Alice S. Wentworth from Capt. Zeb Tilton at Vineyard Haven. According to newspaper accounts of the day, Capt. Hall put into Boston where an anti-submarine patrol was being maintained. Parker went booming up the channel in the Wentworth with a magnificent disregard for the frantic signals coming from the patrol vessels of the Navy and Coast Guard. He hove to only when he reached an anchorage that suited him.

"Apparently the captain realized that he was slowly 'running out of steam,' because he called on Capt. Freeman Ciosson to help sail the Wentworth to Maine. Not long afterward, he returned to Massachusetts, and we never saw him again."

Among those who did see Parker Hall again were Winsor White, John Cutler, Laurel Freeman.

We remember the summer afternoon in 1948 when Winsor White brought a craggy stranger to our house. That day Winsor had found Hall sitting on a fence near the Cable House at the corner of Washington and St. George streets, and he invited Hall to stay with him at his home on Cove St. until the retired sea captain found a room on Bay Rd. Hall died a few weeks later, soon after visiting cemetery superintendent Laurel Freeman to pick out his final resting place in Mayflower Cemetery.

A few days before his death, Hall had gone to Assinippi to order a tombstone from F. M. Barnicoat. Etched with a ship, the stone reads:

**Parker Jones Hall**

**Master Mariner**

**June 16, 1862**

**Aug. 25, 1948**

**Owner and Master of**

**16 other Schooners**

Knowing the end was near, Parker Hall wanted to return to his home port. When he died in Rockland at the age of 86, his official residence was 18 Beale Place, Scituate, where from time to time he had lived with his brother Samuel.

According to a prevalent account, Hall had been in the Sailor's Home on Long Island just before coming to Duxbury for the last time.

Of medium height, Hall was so broad shouldered he had to turn sideways when going down the companionway. Even during his life, old salts marveled at his ability to sail large schooners single-handed. Why did he sail alone? According to one account, he had shot a man out of the rigging. Other seafarers said he was too ornery to get along with a crew. Hall told Grant the real story after returning from a trip to Duxbury and Scituate.

"Why have you always sailed alone, Captain?"

"It was some time before he replied to my question, but the answer finally came. He said that as a younger man, he was captain of the Robert P. King, a schooner somewhat larger than the George Gress. After discharging his cargo at a New England port, Capt. Hall went to the company office to pick up his freight money in cash. As soon as he stepped on board the vessel, his 3 crewmen jumped him, intending to get the cash, a sizeable sum for those times.

"At first he tried to reason with the men, but it was evident that they meant business. As the would-be robbers circled around him, the captain picked up an axe which was lying on the cabin top. When the 3 men closed in, the captain started swinging.

After he clipped 2 of them with the blunt end of the axe, they had had enough and jumped ashore, but the third was determined to get that cash, so he kept swinging madly with his bare fists. When the captain landed a solid blow, the third crewman went overboard. "N-n-no one saw him around those parts again," Hall said.

The captain was in court as a result of the fracas, but he entered a plea of self-defense, and the case was dismissed with the stipulation that he could not command a crew for several years."

After going to Maine, Hall sailed the George Gress, a former Hudson River bricker of 64 tons. The heavy old coaster was in bad shape when Hall took her over, so he spent a lot of time and money getting her shipshape. For a few years, Parker Hall sailed the Gress for an absent owner. Finally he became the owner but under rather unusual circumstances.

During the prohibition days of the late '20s and early '30s, Hall succumbed to that temptation to make an easy dollar.

One year, the Coast Guard men operating on the Penobscot from Rockland to Bangor had had the George Gress under surveillance for several weeks. One day, spying the schooner sailing up-river toward Bangor, officers

aboard the Coast Guard boat wondered why the Gress was "so down at the head." They knew Hall and figured he wouldn't do anything illegal but they had a job to do, so they boarded the schooner and looked around.

The old skipper was standing by the rail when the Coast Guard boat drew up alongside. Whenever Hall became excited or disturbed, he stuttered profusely. "C-c-come aboard," he said to the officer who was first on board. "Anything wrong?"

"Just checking," the Coast Guardsman replied. "By the way, what kind of cargo are you carrying?"

"Just laths."

"Mind if we look down into the cargo hold?"

"N-n-no, go right ahead."

When the hatch covers were lifted, the officer saw what appeared to be a good load of laths, just as Capt. Hall had said.

"After removing 2 or 3 layers of laths, the government men found what they had suspected would be, a hold filled with cases of fine liquor.

"N-n-now, how in tarnation did that stuff get aboard my vessel," Hall asked. "Someone must a played a t-t-trick on me."

During the hearing, the skipper maintained he didn't know there was liquor aboard his craft. When the judge asked, "How can an intelligent man like you try to make us believe a yarn like this," Hall said "If I knew a better one, uh-uh-I'd tell it."

And he did when the Gress went on the auction block. Acting in behalf of Capt. Hall, the friend got the schooner at a bargain. Hall became the new owner and the first thing he did was change the vessel's homeport to Sandy Point, Me.

The Gress and her colorful captain became better known on the Maine coast during the next decade as he ferried cargoes of bricks, lumber, coal and laths. When coastal business was quiet, the captain took out sailing parties by the day.

According to Grant square dancing was one of his pleasures, and he rarely ever missed the Friday night dances held at the Sandy Point Community Hall. Local folks said they enjoyed his sea-going yarns flavored with salty phrases. One evening he spied a strange lady across the hall. Turning to his young friend he said, "Uh-uh-I'd like to dance with that one. Take a look at her stern and see where she hails

from, Herbie."

Once when asked whether he  
had ever been married, he said,

"Well, yes. I married a gal once.  
rigged her in good clothes, fore

and aft. and then she l-i-left me."

Once a year, he took off for a  
week's visit with his brothers in  
Duxbury and Scituate.